C. SUNDRY COURT CUSTOMS

644 The paraphernalia of royalty are very modest in the Thonga courts. However there are some to be mentioned in addition to the regalia which I have described.

I. *The Big Drum* (Muntshintshi).

644 This is found in every capital, even sometimes in the sub-chief's
534 villages. It is made of a hollowed stem, somewhat like an ordinary
237 mortar; or it may be rounded, and even provided with three legs, as in Nondwane; a piece of skin is stretched over the opening. This may be the skin of an elephant's ear, of a buffalo, of an ox or of an antelope *mangulwe*. This instrument is subject to some taboos; when the skin cracks, it is forbidden to look inside. There is something mysterious about it and nobody must disclose that mystery. People say that a bullet is introduced into it when it is made. In Shiluvane they asserted that the skull of the hostile chief, Sikororo, killed in the battle of Nov. 1901, had been put into the big drum! At any rate, there is a special individual who is summoned to repair it and he receives a fowl as reward.

644 The big drum is beaten on various occasions:
534 a) To announce a great fatality, especially the death of a chief,
731 or the day of the publication of the mourning; also the approach
202 of the inundation, when the Nkomati river rises, in January or February, and threatens to cover the whole land; again when the bush fire threatens to destroy the capital.

b) To summon warriors to the capital in case of imminent war.

644 c) To execute various musical performances. The big drum
534 leads a special dance (nkino), which takes place at the capital during the winter, when the harvest is ended, and the country happy and prosperous. It is accompanied by a smaller drum (shikolombane) which is called the "son" of the big one. The

644 534 *shikolombane* is more elongated and has no legs. Its sound is high and piercing, while the tone of the *muntshintshi* is deep and low. The music proper of this dance is provided by the *bunanga*.

II. *The Bunanga.*

533 644 This is the regular *band*, which is met with in every royal clan. The word comes from *nanga*, trumpet (pl. tinanga). But the trumpets composing the bunanga are not the common pierced tibias of goats used by the herdboys. They are larger horns of the mhalamhala (Hippotragus Niger), or of the mhala (Zulu impala), pierced at their base in such a way that they produce different tones. These instruments are made by specialists, (it was Nwamatshomane in Nondwane), so as to form a kind of orchestra (simo) composed of ten instruments. To play them is a veritable art. The players stand round the two drumbeaters. The big drum gives the time : when it beats slowly, "tu-tu-tu," the ten musicians must dance in a ring, viz., they must march after each other, playing, making certain grimaces and gesticulations. When the drum beats more slowly and more softly, they must retire in a line and march slowly. The drum quickens the time : then they come to the centre once more and dance in a ring, quicker and quicker. The executants follow each other in a given order, the largest and deepest horn being in front, the smallest and highest toned one at the end of the group. Sometimes three or four orchestras perform at the same time (1).

The bunanga is an old Ronga custom and is very picturesque indeed. As for its musical importance, I shall refer to it again in Part V.

533 609 (1) I remember having heard the bunanga practising in the various sub-clans of Nondwane in 1891, as each sub-chief had his own. They were preparing to go to the capital to mourn Maphunga whose death had just been announced. I saw the bunanga performing its best melodies before Lord Selborne, when he came to pay a visit to the Portuguese settlement of Morakwen in 1908. The Administrator had organised a "batuque" for him (the name given by the Portuguese to these native dances), and the warriors of Nondwane did their best to interest the White Chiefs !

l: Junod M-5 (1895-1909)1927 Thonga

III. *The shipalapala.*

643 534 202 Speaking of the musical instruments of the Court, I must also mention *the trumpet of assembly, shipalapala,* which is the recognised means of summoning the subjects to the capital. The sound of the big drum, though heard at a great distance, cannot reach to the confines of the country. So, when the chief wants his men to assemble at once, he uses the *shipalapala.* This is a horn of mhalamhala, or of nyala or of phifa antelope, the sound of which is like mpu-ù-u (with an accent on the second syllable). The envoy of the chief runs to the capital of a sub-chief, blowing all the time. When he has reached that village, he transmits his message and a young man starts at once with the shipalapala of the sub-chief to another district. So, in a short time, notice is given to the whole tribe to assemble.

IV. *Visitors.*

643 609 574 When a stranger passes through the capital, he must sit down outside the central square and at some little distance from it. Some one will come and inquire what he wants; he replies: "I come from such and such a country, and I wish to pay my respects to the chief." Then the counsellor or "Agent General" charged with the affairs of the traveller's country will come and converse with him and announce him (bika) to the chief, who will receive him affably and possibly assign him a hut to sleep in, in case he wishes to stay the night, at the same time providing him with food. Should the chief be particularly well disposed towards his guest, he will kill a calf or even an ox for him; and he, on his return, will speak in praise of the hospitality he has received, saying: "The chief made me share his reign," literally: "He made me reign, (a ndji fumisile)." Such is the procedure when the respective countries of guest and host are adjoining and the tribes

2: Junod · M-5 (1895-1909) 1927 Thonga
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CHAPTER III

Music.

533 Music in a more or less rudimentary form, plays a great part in the Life of the Bantu tribe. Some tribes are more gifted than others in this respect. In the Province of Mozambique the Ba-Chopi are certainly the best musicians, as we shall see. But Thongas are also great singers and players, and their dances are invariably accompanied by music. What is its character? The melodies and rhythms are very difficult to catch, and I do not pretend to give here a full and definite description of Thonga music ; but the following specimens will convey a fair idea of it, and a study of their musical instruments will help us, in some measure, to understand their musical system.

A. MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS.

1) Wind Instruments.

534 The simplest is the *shiwaya*, an empty sala shell, or the shell of a Kafir orange (p. 19) : it has two holes, one through which children sing, another which they alternately shut and open, the withdrawal of the hand allowing the sound to be emitted ; the result is a monotonous wu-wu-wu, which is sufficient to amuse little boys.

Next in importance comes the *nanga*, (yi-tin) the goatherd's flute, made of the tibia of a goat, or of some other animal, on which the boys play two notes, generally in thirds. This is truly the infancy of art, but the tone of these little flutes is very sweet and wonderfully in keeping with the bush life, the bleating

of the goats and the nudity of the artist! There are many kinds 534
of goatherds' flutes. One is called *ndjwebe* ; its sound resembles mbvrrr.... mbvrrr.... Natives are in the habit of putting a feather inside their bone flutes in order to keep them clean.

Another more elaborate flute is made of a reed, having a hole at one extremity for the mouth, and three others at the other extremity for the fingers. According to the number of holes stopped, the sound varies. It is called *shitiringo* (Dj.), or *shitloti* (Ro.), and Native artists are capable of producing pleasing tunes upon it. No. 39 in my collection of tunes is a shitiringo melody, heard on the banks of the Great Tabi.

But the true tinanga are the trumpets which compose the *bunanga*, the band already referred to (I. p. 431) as being one of the manifestations of Court Life. They are also called *timhalamhala*, from the name of the mhalamhala (Hippotragus niger), the large, dark antelope whose horns are employed for the manufacture of these trumpets, together with the horns of the mhala (impala) antelope. These instruments are tuned according to rule. Ten of them, each having a different sound, form a *simo*, a kind of orchestra, completed by the big and the small drum already described. They are used to accompany the special 535
dances which take place in the little capital of the Ronga clans, and in which the players are themselves the dancers, marching behind each other, with peculiar contortions, narrowing and widening their circle according to the time beaten by the drum.

The bunanga players receive a regular training before going 533
to the capital, to play before the chief. When they have prepared the numbers of their programme, they all go to the capital, each sub-chief leading his band, for a musical contest. The tinduna act as judges. Each *simo* plays in turn. The judges discuss their respective merits, and when they have come to a decision, they call a young man to proclaim the result of the competition. This proclamation is called *ku tjema shibangu*, to cut the contest, and is performed in a very curious way. The herald has an axe in his hand. With a loud voice, he pronounces the verdict : "So and so played badly ; so and so better ; the one who played best is so and so." — "Nkino hi nkhensa wa ka man." Then he

533 beats the trunk of a tree with his axe, as if he wished to confirm the decision, and runs away. This is to avoid protests and insults from those who did not win!

No. 40 is a tune played by the bunanga. It is very monotonous and the music is evidently not so important as the dance, the rhythm, and the contortions. There are only four notes in this tune. However it is probable that the ten instruments of the simo form a whole octave, with two notes below it, the same as the ten keys of the timbila which will presently be described. Unfortunately I have not been able to ascertain if this is actually so, having only once witnessed the performance of the bunanga. I am afraid the bunanga orchestra of antelope horns has now entirely disappeared from Ronga territory.

2) Stringed Instruments.

534 As regards stringed instruments, they possess the *unicord harp* called *gubu*. There are two different forms of it ; the *shitjendje*, which consists of a bent rod, a bow, both extremities of which are united by a string made of milala palm fibres (nkuha), or a piece of wire. On the lower part of the bow a calabash is fixed as sounding box. The shitjendje is held upright ; one hand grasps it at its lower extremity, whilst the other beats on the lower third of the string with a little stick. The hand which grasps the instrument places its finger on this lower third of the string in different places, so as to vary the length and produce different sounds.

A gubu player.

534 In the *nkaku*, the sounding box is fixed in the middle of the bow. From it a wire starts and is tied to the middle of the string, thus dividing it into two equal parts. The instrument is grasped near the calabash, and the fingers are extended on either half of the string to differentiate the sounds. The other hand beats on either side with a stick.

The tune No. 12 was accompanied by a shitjendje.

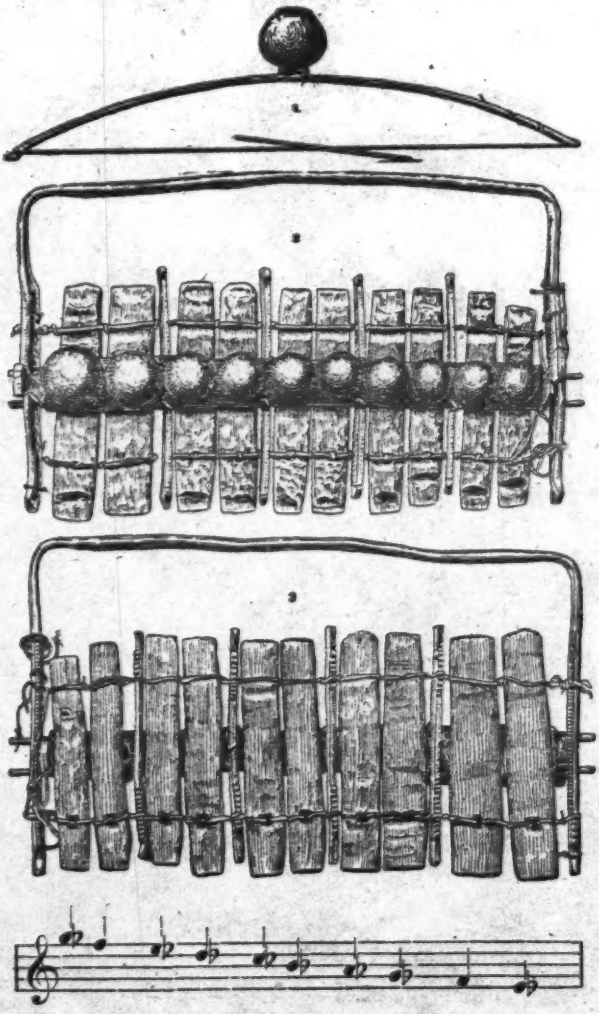
3) The Timbila or Bantu Xylophone.

The most completely characteristic musical instrument of our tribe is the *timbila*, which may be seen on the accompanying plate showing both the upper and the under side of this very interesting Native piano. It is composed of ten keys, made of very hard wood, attached to each other by straps of leather on a wooden frame consisting of a curved branch. The keys rest on shells of sala, which act as sounding boxes, and in which two holes are pierced, one in the upper part to receive the sound, and one at the side, covered by a membrane, generally a piece of a bat's wing, in order to cause the sound to vibrate. This piano is easy to carry. The player places it in front of him and beats on the keys with one or two sticks, furnished at one extremity with an india-rubber or a leather ball. (See the cover of *Les Chants et les Contes des Ba-Ronga*).

Comparing it with a European piano I have ascertained that the third key is a G flat, and that, if we strike the following ones, up to the last, we obtain a regular major scale, that of G flat, with its proper half tones between the third and fourth and the seventh and eighth intervals. The two lower keys are, the first E flat, the second F natural. The interval from E flat to G flat is a minor third, so that, should we start with the lower key and strike the seven following, we should obtain a minor scale of E flat corresponding to the major scale of G flat : but it would not entirely resemble our harmonic minor scale as there is no "sensible," viz., the seventh note of the scale is not raised. Only when descending from the eighth to the first we should have a perfect melodic minor scale. This minor scale, without the

534 raised seventh, is well known in the history of music : it is called the Eolian scale.

So we find this interesting fact as the result of our examination:



The timbila and its ten notes.

the timbila, in its ten notes, contains both the major and minor scales.

Is this accidental ? Or are all the timbila tuned according to

534 533 this method? The second hypothesis is highly probable. Of course there may be slight differences between the instruments, which is not astonishing, as they are made with primitive implements by unskilled workmen ; but the proof that they are all made according to a fixed rule is that many timbila are often played together by musicians who form an orchestra. This is rarely the case amongst Thongas but frequently amongst the

A timbila player.

Ba-Chopi, who are the true "masters" of this instrument. It is said that, in this very musical tribe, Native pianists sit in a line along the street of the village (for their villages are built in a straight line) and play together, all the throng of men dancing in front of them. I witnessed a similar performance when the Crown Prince of Portugal visited Lourenço Marques in 1907. Great feasts were given in his honour ; 25,000 armed warriors defiled before him, and thirty timbila played the National Portuguese Anthem. The Administrators who taught these Native artists to play that difficult tune on their xylophones deserve every congratulation! It was wonderful. The melody

534 was quite recognisable and played in perfect tune. If the timbila
533 had not been tuned to the same pitch, this concert would have become a dreadful cacophony! In the Johannesburg Compounds the East Coast boys manufacture timbila themselves, of smaller and larger sizes, some with enormous keys made of common pitch-pine boards, and emitting deep low tones, the sounding boxes being empty oil cans. They succeed in tuning them more or less perfectly. So every citizen of Johannesburg can hear their concerts, and witness their dances, in the Compounds of the Ferreira Mine and elsewhere on Sundays, and, though these ugly pitch pine timbila seem a parody on the beautiful instruments played at home, still the performance is worth a visit! (1)

533 The existence of the timbila is a proof that these tribes possess a real musical system. The Ba-Chopi are the "masters," and

(1) I have lately received some additional information on the timbila from my son, the Rev. H. Ph. Junod, who is living in Manjakaze, not far from the Chopi border. The keys are cut from a very hard tree, the mwendja. which is first put into a big fire in order to make all the sap run out. Large stems of that tree were used by the Ba-Chopi to built their strongholds when they fought against Gungunyana forty years ago. They have been exposed long enough to the rays of the sun to have dried perfectly, and the instrument makers employ them to furnish their keys. The artist begins with the lowest. His father was himself a timbila player and he tunes his keys in accordance with those of the paternal instrument, slightly diminishing the thickness of the little board till it gives exactly the same sound. This explains how all the instruments are tuned to the same pitch. It is not an easy job to find sala shells of all the required sizes. The vibrating membrane is made of the diaphragm of a small rodent called khweva. All the xylophones seen by my informant in Chopiland start from D (or E flat?). Some have 10, some 12, some 14 keys. Some have only four, but they are enormous and emit deep sounds like drums; they are employed to accompany the others. It is rare nowadays to hear orchestras of timbila, as most of the men are constantly away from their villages, working for the Whites; but individual players are still frequently met with, some of them possessing great dexterity.

The xylophone is widely distributed all over the African Continent, Thongaland being the most southern point where this instrument is found. I saw a magnificent example in Vendaland, in the village of a counsellor named Chikhobokhobo. It had no less than 23 keys forming three complete octaves with two supplementary notes at the top. The owner of this piano was very proud of it and kept it in a special hut. I believe it to be the same which was greatly admired at Wembley where it was exhibited in 1925 by Mr C. T. Harries, the Native Commissioner. In Barotseland the xylophone is called *sirimba*, *marimba* amongst many other tribes of Central Africa, *budimba* or *imbila* amongst the Ba-lla, and *bala* in the French Soudan. Mr Ch. Joyeux, who published an interesting paper on "Quelques manifestations musicales observées en Haute Guinée française" (*Revue d'Ethnographie et des traditions populaires*, Paris, 1924, p. 161-212) has analysed the xylophone of that country and found exactly the same succession of sounds as in the Thonga timbila. The prototype of this instrument is said to be found in the Dutch East Indies and in the Malay Peninsula.

821 825 791 which had caused the flash of lightning, and flies away back to the mountains. The magician who understands the "treatment of Heaven" comes and digs at the spot ; there he finds a kind of gelatinous substance which solidifies after a little time. I possess a little of this curious drug given to me by a Pedi magician, by name Mudjumi ; it resembles a piece of chalk, and is considered very valuable on account of its rareness, and because it is used in the manufacture of the wonderful medicine of Heaven. Should a village have been struck by lightning, the magician of Heaven will come and dig out this foreign body ; if he finds it, the taboo is removed. If he does not, the whole village must move to another place. In the same way, it is taboo to warm oneself at a fire made of the wood of a tree that has been struck by lightning, or to use it as fuel.

The flute of Heaven.
Drawn by J. Wauvs.

821 372 825 778 534 789 824

Happily this dreadful bird can be prevented from killing and burning by magical means. Both the Pedi Mudjumi and the Thonga Makasane possessed the enchanted flute, by which they could force Heaven — or the bird of Heaven — to spare them. Mudjumi having sold me his flute, I can describe it at length. It is made of a hollow bone five inches long, covered with Varan skin, filled at its larger extremity with a black substance like wax. Inside, to keep it clean, there is a vulture's feather. The bone is said to have been taken from the ndlati bird ; the wax substance was made from powder obtained by drying up and pulverising a little of the heart, the eye, the bones, the feathers, and the flesh of the bird. In the wax are embedded three seeds of Abrus precatorius, the "lucky bean" well-known in South Africa, a round seed of a splendid coral colour with a black spot, very much used in Thonga magic. This addition of Abrus precatorius intensifies the sound of the flute and enables it to reach heaven.